

Regional Monitoring and Individual Demand for Skills Development for Low Skilled Employees

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Introduction

This paper considers some issues in monitoring the regional demand of individuals for skills development, using Scotland in the UK as an illustration. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, a non-departmental public body, (UKCES 2010) found that Scotland is relatively weak in the area of Intermediate skills compared to other UK nations and internationally. This raises questions concerning the regional monitoring of skills demand and of the barriers to low skilled individuals in improving their skills, including up to Intermediate levels.

The chapter considers participation in skills development such as training (including the influence of demographic characteristics) and barriers to this among low skilled people. It highlights the lack of regional data, in the UK and across the EU in general, and the need for such regional data in order to support effective and efficient skills development.

Participation in training

In terms of skills demand the EU, in line with the Lisbon targets, is increasing its qualifications profile as greater numbers receive high and medium qualifications and the numbers of people with lower qualifications is decreasing. Demand for skills has also changed as a result of the economic crisis but there is continued demand for high skilled workers, and there are still likely to be many job opportunities for the low-qualified (Wilson 2010).

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has identified an imbalance between the numbers of skilled workers and the number of skilled jobs. They argue that this is a 'demand side' issue in that there are too few high skills, high value and high performance workplaces; and therefore in order to address the imbalance employer ambition needs to be raised to increase demand for high skilled workers (UKCES 2009). In addition, higher skilled or higher trained graduates have been competing for relatively low skilled jobs, hence placing the low skilled at an increasing disadvantage.

In a further UKCES report on 'Employee Demand for Skills Development' (Johnson et al. 2009) a series of general conclusions were made, including raising the skill levels in a (regional) economy depends to some extent on individuals investing in their own skill development, by expressing their demand for formal and informal training to employers and others. They suggest that people are more or less likely to demand

skills development, depending on a range of 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' factors. For example, people with few qualifications, those who are not employed or who work in smaller or non-unionised workplaces tend to be less likely than others to either engage in, or demand, skills development.

Due to demographic changes in many regions and Member States it is anticipated that the supply of unskilled workers will fall. Further, the supply of people with an education equal to upper secondary level will exceed demand but the supply of people with a vocational education (skilled level) is anticipated to fall (Madsen 2008). However, the shifting, or rising, skills composition of labour demand means that the potential employment of unskilled workers may also fall.

It has been argued that highly educated workers were more likely to be interested in training, but when they were unable to do so they felt more constrained (showing an interest in taking more training but not being able to) than lower educated workers. So an argument is that the workers' lower training levels for low educated and older employees can be attributed to their own preferences. There are, however, many other reasons why employers and the low skilled themselves do not invest in training and up-skilling, including lack of demand, low returns to improving low level skills etc. (Keep/ James 2010).

An important source of regional information is the long running The National Adult Learning Survey¹. In the UK for 2010, this considers three specific types of learning:

- Formal learning, which leads towards a nationally recognised qualification;
- Non-formal learning, a course or taught class that does not lead to a nationally recognised qualification;
- Informal learning, involving self-study to improve knowledge of a subject, not involving taught classes or qualifications.

Participation in the latter two has fallen considerably since 2005 (with a small rise from 24% to 25% of people participating in formal learning). There are large differences between groups (e.g. age groups, people with childcare problems) in participation in learning, with cost and time being the main barriers.

The UK has a high level of participation in training and education for the working aged population (18-64 years old) (23.9% in 2009) compared to most EU countries (although well below the level of most Nordic EU countries) and well above the EU-27 average of 15% (Table 1). In general the rates slightly fell in the five years to 2009. The EU-15 figures (which are more similar to the UK on average as it excludes the more recent accession countries) are around one percentage point above the EU-27 figures. In some Member States, such as the UK, the numbers may be unreliable due to small relevant sample sizes, especially at regional level, hence making regional monitoring difficult.

¹ For Scotland see, for instance, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/16105856/12>.

Table 1: Participation of total population aged 18-64 years in education and training 2005-9 (Source: Eurostat)

	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
European Union (27 countries)	15.0	15.0	15.1	15.4	15.8
European Union (15 countries)	16.0	15.9	16.0	16.5	16.8
Belgium	12.2	12.0	12.1	12.3	14.2
Bulgaria	6.6	6.7	6.5	6.1	6.9
Czech Republic	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.7	11.7
Denmark	37.0	35.2	33.8	34.3	32.5
Germany	14.2	14.1	14.4	13.9	13.9
Estonia	18.2	17.5	15.6	14.9	14.6
Ireland	10.8	11.6	12.1	12.4	12.2
Greece	8.3	8.2	7.5	7.7	7.6
Spain	14.6	14.6	14.7	14.8	15.7
France	12.9	13.1	14.5	14.8	14.2
Italy	11.2	11.4	11.3	11.1	10.8
Cyprus	11.1	11.9	12.0	10.4	9.0
Latvia	12.4	13.7	13.9	13.2	16.3
Lithuania	13.3	14.2	13.8	13.1	15.5
Luxembourg	19.1	14.8	13.4	14.0	15.4
Hungary	9.3	9.6	10.0	10.1	10.5
Malta	9.4	10.0	9.8	9.4	10.2
Netherlands	23.6	23.4	22.9	21.9	22.0
Austria	18.3	17.6	17.3	17.4	17.6
Poland	13.6	14.2	14.9	14.6	15.0
Portugal	10.7	9.3	8.3	8.6	10.1
Romania	7.9	8.2	7.8	8.0	8.5
Slovenia	21.7	20.9	21.7	22.1	22.9
Slovakia	9.4	9.9	10.2	10.7	12.0
Finland	27.2	28.0	28.4	28.1	27.7
Sweden	27.0	26.7	23.4	22.9	25.3
United Kingdom	23.9	23.5	23.6	30.8 (u)	32.1 (u)
Norway	23.0	24.2	22.6	23.3	22.5
Switzerland	28.2	32.5	31.5	27.1	31.4

U: unreliable/uncertain data.

Participation in training by demographic characteristics

Low skilled workers who are older usually receive less training than other age groups, while women also gain slightly less training (Smeaton/ Vegeris 2009). However, financial returns to individuals from training vary according to gender, educational or skills levels, and inequalities may partly arise due to variations in the distribution of training investments (Hansson, 2008). In the UK the percentage of those participating in job related training or education in 2006 (Labour Force Survey data) indicate a slightly higher rate for males (82.0%) compared to women (79.9%) and falls with rising age groups (Table 2). At a regional level in the UK there is wide variation, although care must be taken due to small sample sizes. Taking this into account, the prosperous London and South East England areas have relatively low rates, perhaps due to a large, mobile labour pool meaning employers do not feel the need to invest in training and/or a higher share of workers only working temporarily and not seeking training.

Table 2: Percentage participating in job related training or education in 2006 (Source: Labour Force Survey)

	Total	Male	Female	25 to 34 years	35 to 54 years	55 to 64 years
North East	80.8	75.4	85.2	84.0	72.2	50.0
North West (incl. Merseyside)	79.2	79.3	79.1	62.2	70.6	100.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	82.6	83.5	81.9	78.9	70.3	66.7
East Midlands	82.7	81.1	83.8	83.3	72.7	71.4
West Midlands	84.4	89.8	80.9	71.0	80.0	100.0
Eastern	80.4	83.6	78.4	88.9	73.0	28.6
London	78.2	81.8	75.7	68.7	73.6	71.4
South East	77.9	78.6	77.4	69.6	74.0	50.0
South West	79.1	79.0	79.2	74.1	66.7	25.0
Wales	81.0	82.5	79.7	81.3	71.4	66.7
Scotland	83.0	84.8	81.4	73.8	78.6	33.3
Northern Ireland	84.9	85.3	84.6	100	90.0	50.0
UK	80.8	82.0	79.9	74.4	73.8	56.1

The European Commission (2008) has stated that lifelong learning (LLL) participation rates for the EU-27 have increased by 35% since 2000 (although LLL is a wide concept, including informal learning etc., as well as Continuing Vocational Training). On average, for the EU 27 in 2006, there were more women than men taking part in LLL (10.4% of women aged 25+ took part in LLL, compared to 8.8% of adult men, although employment rates are lower for women than men at all levels of educational attainment (Beck-Domzalska 2007). The percentage of employees participating in Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) courses do not vary greatly by gender (Table 3), although in the UK they are slightly higher for men but similar to EU-27 levels for both genders.

This type of data would be useful for regional labour market monitoring, but is not available consistently across the EU. The Eurostat (2007) Adult Education Survey covers participation in formal, non-formal and informal education and lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning) for all persons aged 25-64, living in private households. Microdata are available although sample sizes for regional analysis are limited, but it should allow regional analysis between urban and rural regions and analysis at NUTS2 levels is only possible in those areas with adequate sample sizes. Hence there is usually a major problem with identifying more detailed regional data using this survey. The Labour Force Surveys in each EU Member State provide larger datasets for some regional analysis.

Table 3: Percentage of employees (all enterprises) participating in Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) courses, by sex, 2005 (Source: Eurostat)²

	Total	Males	Females
European Union (27 countries)	33	34	31
Belgium	40	40	39
Bulgaria	15	16	13
Czech Republic	59	63	52
Denmark	35	32	39
Germany	30	32	27
Estonia	24	23	26
Ireland	49	46	53
Greece	14	13	15
Spain	33	33	35
France	46	47	43
Italy	29	29	28
Cyprus	30	30	30
Latvia	15	14	15
Lithuania	15	15	14
Luxembourg	49	48	51
Hungary	16	16	15

² The training activity must be the result of a decision in the enterprise (e.g. by the line manager), with a primary objective of acquiring new competencies or the development and improvement of existing competencies. It includes people paid (full- and part-time and seasonal workers) by the enterprise as well as working proprietors, working partners and unpaid family workers. A training measure or activity should be financed in total or at least partly by the enterprise (directly or indirectly), although if an enterprise does not pay for CVT courses, but does give time off work instead, this is to be considered as enterprise provided CVT. There must be a training event and trainer/mediator (person or e.g. computer). It excludes routine work-adjustment training and information transfer. Also excluded are apprentices, trainees etc. with a special training contract and those working for another firm. CVTS3 - European Union Manual (2005); http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/dsis/edtcsl/library?l=/public/lifelong_statistics/continuing_vocational/reference_documents/master_finalpdf/ EN 1.0 &a=d.

Malta	32	30	36
Netherlands	34	36	31
Austria	33	36	30
Poland	21	21	20
Portugal	28	29	27
Romania	17	18	17
Slovenia	50	47	53
Slovakia	38	42	31
Finland	39	38	41
Sweden	46	47	45
United Kingdom	33	32	34
Norway	29	30	28

Participation rates in job related non-formal education and training (although this is much higher than in more formal Continuing Vocational Training courses) are lower in the UK than the EU-27 level and lower for females than males (Table 4).

Table 4: Participation rate in job related non-formal education and training by sex (% of total), 2007 (Source: Eurostat)

	Total	Males	Females
European Union (27 countries)	83.5	88.1	78.9
Belgium	85.3	89	81.2
Bulgaria	96.3	97.2	95.3
Czech Republic	93.3	95.3	90.7
Denmark	93.1	94.6	91.6
Germany	88.0	92.6	82.7
Estonia	90.5	92.1	89.4
Greece	84.1	92.0	76.4
Spain	72.9	81.3	64.3
France	89.8	91.8	87.7
Italy	71.0	78.5	63.6
Cyprus	80.9	84.7	76.8
Latvia	84.4	88.3	82.0
Lithuania	89.3	91.5	87.9
Hungary	81.9	84.7	79.3
Malta	77.7	87.3	67.3
Netherlands	84.7	90.5	78.1

Austria	80.5	86.1	74.4
Poland	87.5	90.5	84.7
Portugal	84.0	87.8	80.0
Romania	82.6	83.5	81.7
Slovenia	70.8	75.8	66.1
Slovakia	92.0	94.6	89.3
Finland	85.6	86.8	84.7
Sweden	88.0	91.7	84.2
United Kingdom	76.0	80.1	72.3
Norway	93.0	93.4	92.5
Croatia	78.1	79.6	76.7
Turkey	70.0	84.7	45.4

Training and Age

There is a clear association between age and the amount of training (including informal training) offered to and received by workers. Participation rates decrease significantly with age in the EU 27 (from 15.5% for 25-34 year olds, to 4.6% in the 55-64 age group). However, in some countries the participation rate remains high throughout the age groups, which is consistent with a deeply embedded LLL culture in these countries, e.g. Denmark and Sweden (European Commission 2008). Demographic changes mean that the percentage of over-65s in relation to those aged 15-64 will increase from 26% in 2008 to 38% by 2030 indicating the need for increased productivity of those in work (EU Expert Group 2010). This group argues that there is a need to integrate 'Education and training' and 'work' into a single lifelong learning process, open to innovation and to all and there needs to be a massive increase in skills investment.

Employees aged over 55 are less likely than other workers to participate in training, or to have been offered it. Older employees are also less likely than younger or mid-life workers to take up any opportunities for training that are made available. Furthermore, older workers are more likely only to have received on-the-job training (Newton et al. 2005; Johnson et al. 2009).

Drawing on Devins et al. (2011), the attitudes and current perceptions to learning of younger people are influenced by experiences at school, with education and in particular systems, rules and regulations that are beyond their control (Opinion Leader Research 2002). Opinion Leader Research (2002) also found that many participants feel that their friends and family do not value education and the fact that there is no culture of learning means that they have no role models, so a person's social networks are important. Many comment that they were not expected to continue with education past 16 and going back to education in later life is simply something that they would never consider. However, training and 'learning' are considered more positively as the young person feels that usually they have choice as to whether they participate or not. Sen's (1985, 2009) Capabilities Approach would suggest a more positive reaction when the young person has the capability of choice (Lindsay/ McQuaid 2010). It would be of interest to regional labour market monitoring to assess the level of such capabilities, or the level of reaction to non-

school learning in a region compared other national and EU regions.

Participation in job related non-formal education and training also varies by age (Table 5), especially dropping from the age of 55 years with the UK lower at all age groups compared to the EU-27. The UK strongly follows this pattern and is also lower than the EU-27 average for all age groups, but especially for those 55-64 years olds.

Table 5: Participation rate in job related non-formal education and training by age groups (% of total), 2007 (Source: Eurostat)

	Total	From 25 to 34 years	From 35 to 54 years	From 55 to 64 years
European Union (27 countries)	83.5	83.9	86.3	71.1
Belgium	85.3	91.5	87.8	62.8
Bulgaria	96.3	93.4	97.5	98.2
Czech Republic	93.3	89.5	94.8	94.7
Denmark	93.1	91.6	95.8	86.2
Germany	88.0	88.3	90.4	76.2
Estonia	90.5	89.8	91.1	90.1
Greece	84.1	86.9	83.5	75.4
Spain	72.9	74.2	75.2	56.9
France	89.8	92.1	91.4	72.1
Italy	71.0	67.0	75.4	59.5
Cyprus	80.9	83.5	81.6	67.3
Latvia	84.4	83.4	84.9	84.5
Lithuania	89.3	85.1	91.0	91.0
Hungary	81.9	78.5	84.7	77.1
Malta	77.7	82.7	78.9	58.5
Netherlands	84.7	89.3	86.4	69.8
Austria	80.5	79.9	85.3	58.3
Poland	87.5	83.0	90.9	87.5
Portugal	84.0	81.0	88.2	74.0
Romania	82.6	76.1	85.8	85.3
Slovenia	70.8	68.2	76.8	49.9
Slovakia	92.0	89.0	93.8	91.7
Finland	85.6	85.9	89.8	72.1
Sweden	88.0	87.2	91.4	80.9
United Kingdom	76.0	79.5	79.4	60.9
Norway	93.0	92.3	94.3	90.0

Barriers to skills development

There are many barriers to low skilled people taking up skills development including financial constraints, limited access to information, advice or guidance, negative influence from family or peers and in some cases negative early experiences of education or training. For those in work, the attitudes and practices of their employers can play an important role in stimulating or inhibiting skills development.

Public policy initiatives across the UK and the nations have attempted to stimulate individual demand for skills development by addressing some, or all of, these barriers (Johnson et al., 2009). However there is concern that some initiatives – particularly those involving financial support – may have the greatest impact on people who are already highly qualified. Evidence from Scandinavian countries in particular suggests that wider societal attitudes towards education and learning play a crucial role, increasing the chances of success of individual initiatives. There also appears to be a lack of systematic evidence at the regional level concerning demand for skills development, barriers and effective policies.

A considerable body of evidence suggests that access to and/or demand for skills development opportunity varies according to the individual's characteristics, background and position in the labour market, among other factors (see: Newton et al., 2005; Johnson et al. 2009 and McQuaid/ Lindsay/ Johnson 2010). It is also important to acknowledge that individuals' demand for skills development is only one factor shaping levels of access – even where individuals express an interest in learning new skills, barriers associated with cost, work organisation and the accessibility of provision can limit opportunities. In brief, Johnson et al. (2009) argue that existing research suggests:

- People with few qualifications, low-skilled people, older workers, part-time workers and those working in small or non-unionised workplaces tend to have lower than average rates of participation in skills development;
- The 'culture of learning' within the workplace appears to play an important role in influencing both employer and employee decisions about investment in skills development;
- Clear progression routes and accreditation can play a role in facilitating continued skills development, particularly for people over the age of 40;
- Returns to accredited training at the lowest levels of qualification tend to be relatively low. This is likely to influence low-skilled individuals' decisions to invest in skills development.

Barriers to individual demand for skills development include financial factors, lack of advice, information or guidance, negative influences from family or peers and a legacy of negative experiences of education. A major personal barrier for some is that they may have almost 'given up' hope of getting a job, or finding an employer willing to employ them and such lack of self-efficacy may deter them from taking up skills development opportunities (James, 2007; Devins et al. 2011). Other barriers include limited awareness of the potential benefits of skills development and perceived poor quality or lack of access to relevant provision.

Research suggests that the financial benefits in terms of wages of 'low level' training for those in low paid jobs is relatively small, if at all, but the psychological and social benefits of training in the workplace may be as important, or even more so, than financial ones (Wolf, 2011; Wolf et al. 2010), although other research (McQuaid et al.

2012; McQuaid 2012) found that pay increases can be a strong motivator for participating in training. Devins et al. (2011) suggest that interventions based on encouraging demand for training by providing more information about provision and choice of course may struggle to benefit those with low skills. There is also evidence which suggests that those with low skills may be least likely to take advantage of initiatives such as Individual Learning Accounts due to for example their understanding of the mechanism and their already precarious financial position.

It is useful to divide these into intrinsic and extrinsic factors as both appear to influence individuals' investment in skills development (Johnson et al. 2009). Intrinsic factors are taken to be those that relate to the individual's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and motivation (e.g. an individual's motivation to learn, educational attainment, skills, socio-economic status, age, gender and ethnicity). Extrinsic factors are those external factors that affect an individual in their take-up of skills development (such as household circumstances and workplace environment and issues, including an employer's training practices and policies, management or supervisor support, trades union support etc.). Some of these may be related to industrial sector, employer size, legislative requirements etc. So both influence an individual's behaviour and decision-making related to skills development. These are likely to vary considerably between regions (especially 'extrinsic' factors) and it would be useful to monitor these at a regional level.

It is important to note that intrinsic and extrinsic factors will often be inter-related. There are links between extrinsic factors such as the availability of 'space' for work-based training within organisations and aspects of job design, and individuals' motivation and take-up of learning opportunities. There are also clear links between individuals' level of motivation and extrinsic factors such as time pressures around balancing work and family life.

Intrinsic barriers faced by lower skilled individuals (such as basic skills gaps and negative attitudes towards learning as a result of 'educational inheritances') can combine with extrinsic features (such as a lack of appropriate and flexible adult learning provision) to exacerbate the exclusion experienced by some disadvantaged individuals. It is likely that an individual's level of awareness and motivation to learn/train (intrinsic factors) will be similarly shaped by extrinsic factors (such as support and encouragement from employers and the effectiveness of awareness-raising policies). Despite these clear examples of inter-connectedness, skills surveys often report intrinsic and extrinsic factors in a list format, with little reference to how they relate to and reinforce each other. It is important that future research focuses on the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic factors in skills development. Some factors that might usefully be monitored at a regional level include those identified by McQuaid et al. (2010) as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Barriers to skills development

Intrinsic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social barriers: learning perceived to go against social, gender or family norms; learning seen as territory of other age and social groups • Lack of knowledge: of what's available; or resulting in belief that learning is formal, classroom-based and involves formal assessment • Lack of awareness of need to/benefits in engaging in skills development • Lack of confidence and/or self-efficacy (belief in own ability to learn/succeed) • Lack of expectancy that engaging will result in desired outcomes (due to doubts about the relevance and value of learning) • Fear of failure due to 'educational inheritance' from previous experiences • Perception that too old to learn • Perception that 'fully skilled'/no need for further skills development • Gaps in basic skills or other foundations skills facilitating learning • Lack of motivation due to other personal or family priorities
Extrinsic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time due to work/family pressures (and lack of training at appropriate times/locations and other services, e.g. childcare, to address these barriers) • Cost/lack of financial support from employers or other sources • Lack of provision of appropriate quality, relevance and content • Employer unwilling/unable to resource training or time off to train • Lack of physical/virtual space or resources for work-related training • Lack of work culture that encourages skills development and deployment • Lack of job autonomy/ownership so that skills can be effectively deployed • Lack of formal systems for progression/rewarding skills development • Inappropriate allocation of skills development opportunities by management • Lack of support/advocacy from: trade unions; peers; management

Source: McQuaid/ Lindsay/ Johnson (2010)

Finally, on-going research, monitoring and evaluation at the appropriate geographical/regional/local level are crucial in order to ensure that learning from experience is fed back into the system, in terms of both operational and strategic development.

Conclusions

This paper has indicated just a few of the areas where regional labour market monitoring is needed in order to develop appropriate responses by individuals, employers, agencies and government. If there is to be on-going, accurate and efficiently gathered labour market monitoring data that is available for improving evidence based policy, then it is important that consideration be given to expanding existing large surveys to provide the relevant information. Currently there are many holes and inconsistencies in the data at a regional level, which makes appropriate policy making more difficult.

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